

USA FILE

Point of View *By H. Bradford Westerfield*

Bans on Faculty-CIA Links May Endanger Academic and Personal Freedom

The Washington Post
The New York Times
The Washington Times
The Wall Street Journal
The Christian Science Monitor
New York Daily News
USA Today
The Chicago Tribune

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THE RELATIONSHIP between universities and the intelligence community, particularly the Central Intelligence Agency, is still strained, but somewhat less so than it has often been in the past two decades. Therefore the time may be right to attempt a dispassionate appraisal.

While I myself have never been employed by an intelligence agency, I would defend academics who see a benefit in some kind of link to the intelligence community. The core of my defense is that, like everyone else, academics have a legitimate right to privacy and the freedom to engage in outside activities that have no adverse impact on the performance of their professional roles.

Most of us have lives outside academe as family members, citizens, and affiliates of business, social, religious, civic, or advocacy organizations. We participate in private meetings. We offer advice. Sometimes we are paid for doing so, but usually we feel compensated by what we learn and by the sense of worthy service. Insofar as such connections are lawful and not pernicious, we have the right to make them without penalty or publicity.

In short, what we do in our spare time should ordinarily be our own affair. If we choose to consult with a company or a labor union or a political candidate or a government agency or an advocacy group or even a civil-disobedience movement, that should be our own business, with our privacy protected even if we are being paid for the consultation. Of course, if our outside roles conflict with one another or with our academic responsibilities, the concurrent exercise of some of them would be inappropriate or even pernicious.

What concerns us here is how much incompatibility exists between the academic profession and a connection with an intelligence agency. Such connections can bring rewards to scholars, such as a sense of service (broadly patriotic or focused on a particular cause), information and contact useful to their academic work, and financial subsidies for their research.

For example, the C.I.A. directly or indirectly sponsors many worthwhile conferences; commissions some research; helps lobby Congress for aid to area-studies programs; and invites scholars to serve on *ad hoc* or recurrent panels as paid or unpaid reviewers of the agency's draft papers and research. The C.I.A. also operates a scholars-in-residence program, which, according to Deputy Director Robert M. Gates, offers academics an opportunity "to spend a year or two working with us, with full security clearances, on topics of interest to them and to us."

Clearly there is much in such relationships that can benefit scholars, both in their academic roles and in their private lives. Most likely there is at least partial truth in Mr. Gates's further insistence that the C.I.A. is "looking for people to challenge our views, to argue with us, to criticize our assessments constructively."

"In short," he says, "we don't want scholars to tell us what they think we want to hear. That would make our whole effort pointless."

Pointless, skeptics might counter, unless its main purpose or effect is to co-opt academics. Are they right?

As to purpose, it is reasonable to suspect that co-optation is one of the intelligence community's aims, whether or not it is the main one. We are accustomed to the fact that in many of our affiliations, people hope to co-opt us without acknowledging it. And since we know that intelligence people are specifically trained in such tactics, it is only prudent for us to be wary.

As to effect, if we are wary, as most academics nowadays can be presumed to be, the co-optation, if any, is likely to be limited to humanizing former caricatures and should have little if any misleading influence on campus discourse or activities. But there can be exceptions, and that's where the problem lies. To adapt an expression from the intelligence lexicon, is there "blowback" in some cases that distorts the participants' performance of their academic roles?

AN EXAMPLE of distorted performance would be the transmission of bias or—presumably unwittingly—of disinformation, through teaching (in and out of the classroom), publications, or other forms of communication among students, teachers, and scholars. The chief safeguard against such distortion is our usually well-inculcated creed of academic objectivity.

Obviously, all university-intelligence connections should be voluntary. Less obviously, I would argue that any dealings with intelligence agencies should be at arm's length, avoiding not only intimacy but also financial dependence.

I suggest that anything up to 5 per cent of gross income (disregarding reimbursement for expenses) would not represent dependence, and whatever reporting a particular university requires for employees' outside income should suffice. Beyond that point, I believe—despite my emphasis on our right to privacy—it would be reasonable to expect the individual academic

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to be publicly forthright about having some intelligence connection, if not about its exact extent. Also, within the United States, conference subsidies should be disclosed to the participants and publication subsidies to the readers.

Besides possible distortion of teaching and scholarship, academics with intelligence connections have the potential to impair the opportunities of students to pursue the careers they wish, particularly foreign students whom the C.I.A. may try to recruit. They, much more than American students, may feel vulnerable to what they perceive as pressure in the C.I.A. recruiter's pitch. Therefore, any academic asked to "spot talent" for the agency must be alert to the possibility of some perceived coercion. That said, however, academic advisers should not have to exclude from career counseling the discussion of possible intelligence careers or, if requested, the provision of routine information about how to apply. Open C.I.A. recruitment visits to the campus should certainly be permissible. And former intelligence officers who are reasonably open about their backgrounds should themselves be employable within academe.

However, such outrages as recruitment of campus informers to report on teachers or student groups and secret subsidizing of campus organizations, as has happened in the past, are totally unacceptable. Also, academics should resist any intrusions of the kind the National Security Agency made when it tried to limit university mathematics that could have applications to cryptology.

Many people in foreign lands suspect that visiting American researchers are all tools of U.S. intelligence and hence should be avoided. This is a grave problem, which is not fully solvable. The suspicion could not be eradicated even if it were utterly unfounded, and it is probably worsened by the fact that it cannot be utterly unfounded as long as connections between academics and the intelligence community are maintained to the extent that I have been justifying. So academics and intelligence officers who value their connections have the obligation to screen their collaboration scrupulously, instance by instance, to avoid poisoning the waters badly for other researchers. If the problem cannot be solved, at least it can be alleviated.

FINALLY, it is clear that most objections to university-intelligence connections derive from objections to other government-agency policies. Critics usually want not just to minimize contamination of academe, as I have been attempting, but to delegitimize and impede the agencies and their policies—in short, to ostracize them. In the critics' eyes, academe should be pressed into joining this resistance.

Although I have shared many dissenting views in the past decade, I feel strongly that both academic freedom and personal freedom of association can be endangered by such pressure, and that university-intelligence connections should usually be left up to the conscientious choice of individual academics, informed by professional ethics.

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